Language Planning in Sweden

By BERTIL MOLDE*

The Swedish Academy

In 1786 Gustavus III, king of Sweden, founded the Swedish Academy. According to its statutes the main purpose of the Academy should be "to develop the purity, strength, and nobility of the Swedish language." The Academy should fulfill this purpose by working and publishing a Swedish dictionary, a grammar, and "such treatises that can contribute to the consolidation and promotion of good taste." The Swedish Academy thus was the first language planning agency of Sweden. Its main linguistic work during its almost 200 years of existence has been connected with spelling and with the codification of vocabulary. Since 1892, the Academy has been publishing a comprehensive scientific dictionary of Swedish from the 1520 onwards, called the Svenska Akademien ordbok över svenska språket (SAOB; the Swedish Academy's dictionary of the Swedish language). This dictionary uses a scientific and historic approach. To date, it has reached the middle of the letter S (in 26 large volumes); it will be finished some time around the year 2000.

More important for Swedish usage and for the general public is the "word-list" of the Academy, Svenska Akademien ordlista över svenska språket (SAOL), first published in 1874; its tenth revised edition appeared in 1973. This word-list now contains about 150,000 Swedish words, giving their spelling, flexion, and to a certain extent pronunciation. Definitions are offered rather sparingly. The book is widely accepted as normative regarding spelling and flexion. Many users also believe that words not included in the book must not be used in good Swedish; this is certainly not the case. A word-list of some 150,000 words, published once every other decade, can of course not include all words in use, especially not terms from the more specialized vocabularies of the sciences and professions.

Since Swedish spelling was stabilized in the 1800's, there has been one real and official reform of Swedish spelling, in 1906. This rather important reform, however, was made by the government, not by the Academy, which, as a matter of fact, was very strongly opposed to certain parts of it. Since then it has been accepted that the Academy can make minor changes in spelling and flexion (in the word-list) without consulting anybody about it, but it cannot by itself undertake a real spelling reform. If a spelling reform should be made in Sweden, a special reform bill must be passed by the Swedish parliament.

Language Planning Agencies in Scandinavia

Swedish is closely related to Danish and Norwegian, and Swedish is the second official and national language of Finland (the other language, spoken by the great majority of Finns, is Finnish). Icelandic and Faroese, too, are related to the other Scandinavian languages, most closely to Norwegian. There are old and close political, economical, cultural, and social connections between the Nordic Countries, and the fairly good mutual understandability between Swedish, Danish and Norwegian (especially in writing) of course has been of the utmost importance for the relations between these countries. These relations nowadays have their special political platform in the Nordic Council, an institution for cooperation between the Nordic countries on a governmental and parliamentary level.

The question of cooperation between the Nordic countries was very much in focus during World War II, and Nordic linguists were strongly interested in strengthening the connections between the Nordic Languages, especially Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. In the beginning of the forties there were plans for establishing a common Nordic language committee. These plans, however, were abandoned at that time, but they have been taken up again lately. Instead, in 1944 a Swedish language committee was founded (Nämnden för svensk språkvard 'the Board of Cultivation of the Swedish Language'; in

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COMMENTARY ON CHINESE LANGUAGE PLANNING (cf. vol. 1, no. 2, lead article)

In our first 'letter to the editor', Dr. John Lum of the National Institute of Education (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare) writes to update the description of Prof. John DeFrancis that pinyin is relegated to a secondary role in support of the tradition characters. Based on Lum's observation as a member of the American Linguistics Delegation to the People's Republic of China (October to November, 1974), it is his opinion that pinyin is no longer in a secondary role. "It is part and parcel of China's language reform movement, the other two components being (a) the simplification of characters and (b) the popularization of putonghua. Our China hosts, by the way, repeatedly mentioned that much of what our delegation saw in China's language efforts was devised in the last two years." Those interested in further details on Chinese language planning should see the forthcoming volume entitled Language and Linguistics in the PRC, to be published by the University of Texas Press (Austin, Texas).

Linguistics Serves the People

In a recent article describing a visit to China, Charles Ferguson discussed National Language Planning, Minority Nationalities and the English language teaching in China. The article appeared in the March issue of ITEMS (Social Science Research Council Newsletter). In this article, Professor Ferguson pointed out an interesting comparison between the U.S. approach to language as contrasted with that of China. "The application of linguistic expertise to language problems of our society tends to be incidental and nonprestigious. Chinese scholarly concern with language in contrast, is so completely problem-oriented and politicised that linguistic theory as such is incidental and nonprestigious." Further, he noted that "The development of a viable, standardized national language for the communication needs of the country is given considerable visibility."

For further information, see the forthcoming volume entitled Language and Linguistics in the PRC.

THE LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE

A Language and Education Unit, concerned with the comparative review of linguistic research and development in Africa has been set up in 1975. It is proposed that the Unit should address itself to the following tasks:

1) To assemble, review and disseminate information on past, present and proposed policies and practices relating to the use of African languages in education, the mass media and public affairs, with special reference to the contrasting or complementary roles of African and non-African languages in the educational, cultural, social and economic fields.

2) To organise, jointly with institutions in Africa, a new series of International African Seminars, on the theme of Language and Education.

3) To continue and expand the IAI programme of publications on African languages.

4) To endeavour to provide, as and when requested, practical support for language and education projects in Africa.

Further information may be obtained by writing:

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210 High Holborn,
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1974 the name was changed to Svenska spraknämnden, 'the Swedish Language Committee'). A special committee for the cultivation of the Swedish language in Finland was founded two years earlier, in 1942, and a Finnish language board was started in 1945.

Language committees were established in Norway in 1954 (Norsk språknæmd, 'Norwegian Language Committee', since 1971 Norsk språkråd, 'Norwegian Language Council'), in Denmark in 1955 (Dansk Sprogævn, 'Danish Language Committee'), and in Iceland in 1964 (Islensk málnefnd, 'Icelandic Language Committee). The language committees of Norway and Denmark were to a large extent organized on the pattern of the Swedish committee. Also worth mentioning is the special language committee for the Lappish population of Norway, Sweden and Finland which was established in 1971 (Samisk språknæmd).

The national language committees of the Nordic countries now are the official or (as in Sweden) semi-official language planning agencies of their countries, especially as regards general usage. But all of them are, in accordance with their statutes, obliged to cooperate with the other Nordic language committees. The purpose of this cooperation is to avoid new and unnecessary differences between the languages and if possible, to try to close the gaps between the languages.

The main field for the planning and cultivation activities of the different Nordic language committees is the general language, but of course the language and terminologies of different sciences and professions are taken into consideration too. There are, however, in most of the Nordic countries, special institutions dealing with the language(s) of technology. In Sweden, such an institution was founded as early as 1941. It is called Tekniska Nomenklaturcentralen (TNC; the Swedish Center for Technical Terminology).

Swedish Center of Technical Terminology

The present director of the TNC is Dr. Einar Selander (Box 43 041, 100 72 Stockholm 43). It is supported by the Swedish government and by a number of the most important private enterprises in Sweden as well as by several leading organizations and institutions. The Swedish Academy appoints a Swedish linguist as advisor to the TNC. It has a staff of six, three of them civil engineers or natural scientists, three of them have academic degrees in linguistics or social sciences. The TNC publishes Swedish and multilingual glossaries; among the more than 45 multilingual glossaries published by the TNC can be mentioned the Glossary of Brewing and Glossary of Environment (both of them Swedish-English-French-German), the Glossary of Astronautics (Swedish-English-French-German-Russian), and Glossary of Heat Treatment of Metals (Swedish-English-French-German-Russian-Japanese).

The national standardization organizations also deal with terms and try to standardize terminology and usage in different, mostly technical fields. These organizations cooperate with the national language committees, and the centers of technical terminology.

Private Language Associations

In most of the Nordic Countries there are different private organizations and societies interested in language cultivation, and to a certain extent language planning. Such a Swedish society is Språkvårdssamfundet (the Language Cultivation Society), in Uppsala. This society has a publication series called Ord och stil (Words and Style), now containing six volumes, including a book on Swedish pronunciation and its regulation, and a volume on methods and terms of language sociology.

The Swedish Language Committee

The Swedish Language Committee has about 30 members, representing the five universities of Sweden, the Swedish Academy and its dictionary, the Royal Academy of Sciences, the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the Swedish schools, the Association of Teachers of Swedish, the Swedish Center of Technical Terminology, the Swedish Broadcasting Company, the Association of Swedish Writers, the Press Club, the Royal Dramatic Theatre, the Nordic Society, the Swedish Adult Education Association, the Folk University Society, The Swedish Marketing Association, and the Swedish Language Committee in Finland.

The language committee has an executive council of seven members. The chairman of the committee (and the executive council) is appointed by the government from among the members, and the government also appoints the head of the staff of the committee. The vital parts of the statutes of the committee have to be approved by the government. The committee now has a staff of five: four linguists and one clerk. The current director of the committee is Bertil Molde. The government pays the salaries of the four linguists. All other costs are paid by the committee itself, mainly through means obtained from the Swedish Academy (a yearly grant) and different foundations and from the selling of books published by the committee. The Swedish language committee then is a semi-official, state-subsidized organization, with a large amount of liberty of action within the framework of the statutes.

The statutes state that the committee shall "follow the development of spoken and written Swedish and carry on language planning and cultivation activities." And it is also stated that the committee has to try to bring about Nordic cooperation in the fields of language planning and cultivation in order to maintain and strengthen Nordic language unity.

The main scientific interest of the language committee is the changes of modern Swedish, especially in vocabulary, and different forms of official and professional language. The influx of new words into Swedish since World War II has been studied continuously, and a dictionary of new words in Swe-
Swedish is under preparation (parallel to similar Danish and Norwegian dictionaries). The internationally renowned problem of difficult and complicated "official-ease" is another main field of interest. In 1967 the language committee cooperated with the government in publishing a booklet on the language of laws and other official statutes. The purpose of this booklet was, and still is, to modernize the legal language and to make it easier to understand for the common man. Work along these lines will always be one of the main concerns of the language committee.

The Swedish Language Committee has a numbered publication series, now including 55 volumes. The best-seller among those volumes is Skrivregler ("Writing-Rules"), a manual on punctuation, use of capitals, syllabification, abbreviations, and so on. Although this book is only about 50 pages, more than 300,000 copies have been sold. The publication series covers a vast field of linguistics and language planning. Other books deal with themes like Swedish pronunciation, word-formation, different regional forms of Swedish, the language of the mass media, and so on. One of the most recent volumes (No. 51, 1974) is Amerikasvenska ("America-Swedish") by Professor Nils Hasselmo, University of Minnesota.

Apart from this series the language committee publishes dictionaries: a school dictionary of Swedish, a short etymological dictionary, a "style dictionary" (phrases and constructions), a Danish-Swedish dictionary. A Swedish pronouncing dictionary and a Norwegian-Swedish dictionary are in preparation.

Since 1965 the Swedish Language Committee has published a quarterly entitled: Sprogvård ("Language Cultivation"). Similar periodicals are published by the language committees of Denmark and Norway.

Anyone can get advice and help in matters of Swedish usage from the Swedish Language Committee. This service is very much utilized, and more than 7,000 questions from the public are answered yearly, most of them by telephone. These questions range over the whole linguistic field and are asked by all kinds of institutions and people, from government departments and big industries to clerks and typists, from university professors to school children! Many questions regard terminologies outside the concern of the Swedish Center of Technical Terminology so the language committee has tried to become the central institution for all such non-technical terminologies. These plans are still being worked on; a small start has been made in the field of medical language.

The Swedish school system has its own representatives on the language committee. The language committee has no direct influence on the teaching of Swedish in the schools, or on the Swedish textbooks used in the schools. Its indirect influence, however, is rather strong—through the books and the quarterly published by the committee. Authors of textbooks in Swedish normally try to follow the recommendations of the committee. In high school (and of course university) textbooks, the problems of language cultivation are normally discussed and the language committee and its work is presented.

The Swedish Language Committee could be said to be an advisory board: nobody has to follow the advice or recommendations given by the committee. Freedom of speech includes a certain freedom of usage as well. But in spite of that, the Swedish public seems more and more inclined to consider the recommendations from the committee as natural guidelines towards good Swedish usage. When the committee is criticized, and that certainly happens, the critics tend to say that the committee and its linguistic staff are too lenient and liberal in their judgment of different kinds of usage. People dislike being told that in many cases there are two, or even more, quite correct possibilities of expressing oneself, not just the one they themselves use. This is a well-known phenomenon: the layman being far more strict, condemning, and prejudiced in his view on linguistic matters than the linguist or language planner. The Swedish Language Committee feels that it also has an obligation to work at propagating a certain amount of linguistic knowledge to the general public, thus creating wider understanding of linguistic problems and linguistic tolerance.

Further Nordic Cooperation

In April, 1975, Professor Molde attended a conference on problems connected with minority languages in the Nordic countries and "neighbor language problems." At this conference, the language and educational problems of the Finns in Sweden (and the Swedes in Finland); of the Lapps in Finland, Sweden and Norway; of the Eskimos in Greenland were discussed. The proceedings of this conference will be published later this year.

in a letter from Professor Molde to the Editor
**BOOK REVIEW**


Because of its massive linguistic diversity and the prominent role it assigns to social engineering, the Soviet Union provides an important site for the study of language planning. The Soviet Union’s linguistic diversity lies not only in the number of its indigenous languages, but also in their structural differences and differences in standardization and modernization. Soviet language planners have engaged in a variety of activities in the management of this exceedingly complex situation, including the provision of alphabets for unwritten languages, the selection or creation of standard language varieties, the choice of media of instruction in state schools, the design of mass literacy campaigns, the modernization of vocabularies, and the formulation of language teaching priorities and strategies. In addition, state planning activities with respect to such spectacular projects as the establishment of cities, the movement of industries, and the development of virgin lands, involving the migration, often over vast distances, of diverse ethnolinguistic groups, have resulted in new language contact situations, with substantial consequences for language maintenance and language shift. The Soviet sociolinguistic situation is so complex and its social planning so manifold that an account of only selected planning activities in the context of only a few Soviet ethnolinguistic groups would have been a considerable achievement. That Glyn Lewis has provided us with a comprehensive account of Soviet language policy and its implementation must be regarded as a tour de force.

Lewis views the historical operation of Soviet language policy as a series of alternations between centralist and pluralist tendencies. These tendencies are always present, only their relative emphases change. Lewis emphasizes the idea that language planning is an outgrowth and instrument of political decisionmaking and overall social planning. In a fascinating chapter on political conflict and linguistic policy, he describes the periodic expansion and contraction of centralizing political forces and the reflection of this in periodic adjustments of language policy. Soviet language policy, therefore, has not been inconsistent, although its alternations may give the appearance of inconsistency. Rather, Lewis argues, the alternations have resulted from the basic contradiction, at least in the short run, of pursuing simultaneously the centralist and pluralist goals of the “two fronts”. On one front Soviet policy seeks unification, centralization, modernization, and affiliation to a “civic” or supranational (Soviet) culture. This front is clearly associated with Russians, which has been promoted by making it a compulsory subject in schools, providing Russian-medium schools for non-Russian children throughout the Soviet Union, employing Russian as the predominant medium of instruction in institutes of postsecondary education, fostering the lexical influence of Russian on other languages through providing them with Russian scientific, technical, and literary terms, giving unwritten languages Cyrillic alphabets, and by managing textbook and mass media priorities so as to favor Russian. The second front, in contrast, is committed to the development of “group” (ethnic, national) cultures and to the use of non-Russian indigenous languages for social mobilization. Thus non-Russian languages have been promoted by concentrating national and ethnic groups territorially, providing alphabets for unwritten languages, enriching the vocabularies of non-Russian languages, employing non-Russian languages in courts and in the mass media and as mediums for literacy campaigns and instruction in schools, and by transforming tribal dialects into national languages through standardization, graphicization, and official use. It might be argued that social mobilization, even through the medium of non-Russian languages, leads ultimately to unification, centralization, and knowledge of Russian, and that it is more expedient to exploit rather than frustrate sentimental attachment to non-Russian languages. Indeed this has been one argument for their promotion. Lewis believes that whatever the ultimate motivation, this deliberate promotion has unquestionably strengthened them, even if their position has not improved as much as has that of Russian.

Of interest is Lewis’ treatment of second-language pedagogy as an aspect of language planning, reflecting both Soviet ideology and the needs of social planning. Soviet ideology emphasizes both the importance of the social environment in shaping human behavior and the possibility of manipulating the environment so as to modify behavior. On the assumption, therefore, that learning can be directly shaped and speeded, a great effort is made to control second-language teaching tightly, leaving as little as possible to teacher improvisation or to differences in teacher excellence. Thus standardized teaching materials and procedures are stressed. Language pedagogy is an instrument of language planning because, as Lewis points out, promotion of a language through using it either as medium or object of instruction cannot succeed if teachers cannot use it to teach or if students do not learn it when taught. Lewis argues that bilingualism, which was once primarily oral, has become increasingly literate as a result of expanded and improved education, and that bilingualism, which was once the result largely of fortuitous circumstances is increasingly the result of planned language contact, in which the control and systematization of language pedagogy has played an important role.

Lewis believes that although the forces facilitating the expansion of Russian were operating long before the Revolution, and that therefore the position of Russia would have improved even without official encouragement, the government’s careful promotion of Russian has speeded its advance.
However, he also believes that the vitality and resilience of the non-Russian languages are in most cases great, that loyalty to them is considerable, and that although government policy has improved their position, they would in any case have remained strong for a long period of time.

In describing the tenacity with which the non-Russian languages are being maintained, Lewis writes of "the almost mystical unwillingness of languages to submit to their own demise" (293). As symbols of group identity no less than as mediums of communication, languages do seem to have a life of their own. It is likely that the successes of Soviet language policy can be attributed in part to the exploitation rather than the frustration of this life force. To employ another analogy, planners have treated the languages of the Soviet Union in much the same way as engineers treat unruly rivers. Just as engineers plan dams to regulate the flow of water, preventing rivers from overflowing their banks or from changing their course, and harnessing the regulated flow for irrigation and electric power, so Soviet planners have exploited and controlled languages. Just as engineers plan a dam so as to take into account the contours of the land and the direction and speed of the incoming waters, so do Soviet language planners appear to move with rather than against the forces historically underlying language maintenance and language shift among the Soviet Union's various ethnic and national groups. Thus, Lewis believes that Soviet language policy has been implemented more by management and consultative regulation than by imposition and repression, although exclusion of particular languages from the crucial domains of education and employment is not unknown, as can be seen most notably in the case of Yiddish.

Although the language situation of the Soviet Union is, as Lewis argues, sui generis, his book is rich in references to historical and cross-national examples, parallels, and contrasts. His scholarship reflects an unusual breadth, as can be seen from the fact that this book will be of value not only to scholars and practitioners of language planning and second-language pedagogy, but also to those interested in languages in contact, language maintenance and language shift, demography, political processes, and, of course, the Soviet Union. While Lewis is as objective as it is possible to be in describing such a value-laden phenomenon as social planning in the Soviet Union, it is clear that his sympathies lie with the Soviet Union's minority languages. It must have been with considerable satisfaction that he could conclude that the non-Russian languages are strong and that they are likely to remain strong for as far into the future as we are likely to take an interest.

Reviewed by Robert L. Cooper
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IN PREPARATION—Language and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Study of Policies since 1960 by C. M. B. Brann

This reader is being prepared for the International African Institute's new program on Language and Education. Among other items of interest it will include information on early language planning in African languages, the maintenance and change in Eastern (international) languages in African education, on African languages of wider communication and their role in communication and education and the position of second European languages in African education. For further information write:

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The elaboration of the Finnish language considers the same problem as an earlier book by the same author entitled: L'Édification de la langue hongroise, namely: the construction of a language of civilization with a definite mission. In Finland, the Finnish language was the result of a deliberate effort by a small elite group wanting to break up Swedish linguistic domination. This effort at the national level was to give Finland its linguistic independence.